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Department of Energy Public Meeting
Re: High Level Nuclear Waste Rail Corridor to Yucca Mountain, Nevada

The plan to ship high level nuclear waste from across the nation to be stored in an engineered vault under Yucca Mountain, Nevada is an ill-advised plan that the Sierra Club has consistently opposed since its inception.

The rail corridor is one more step in the accomplishment of this ill-advised plan. The rail corridor should be scrapped entirely since the plan to ship high level nuclear waste to Nevada should be scrapped entirely.

Having said that, there are some questions specifically focussed on the rail corridor that need answers.

It was our understanding that the rail lines would preclude high level nuclear waste from being routed through population centers in Nevada. Is this in fact the case? The state's maps show nuclear shipments will go from California, east to Reno and then south to Yucca Mountain. They also show lines through Las Vegas.

From how many and which authorities are rights of way required for the proposed rail line? How many acres of wilderness quality lands would have to be avoided by the rail line?

Will the rail line be planned such that tribal lands along its route are avoided? It is absolutely necessary to respect tribal sovereignty and concerns.

How many shipments with what weight of high level nuclear waste will pass through the Reno/Las Vegas area each week?

How many shipments with what weight of high level nuclear waste would be on this proposed Caliente rail line?

How many people in the U.S. live within a mile of these rail lines?

How will local emergency response teams be equipped to deal with possible accidents? How will they be funded?

What evacuation plans have been developed for Caliente and other locations in Nevada where nuclear waste will be transported? What effect would an accident evacuation have on gridlock in cities that already experience gridlock? In towns that have very few highways and streets?

How many people would be exposed to deadly nuclear waste if an accident leads to a nuclear waste spill or explosion? What are the short-term and long-term effects of that exposure?

What kind of testing will the casks carrying nuke waste be subjected to? The latest the Nuclear Regulatory Commission has stated is that ONE cask will be physically tested once. Is this true? Aren't new engineering concepts usually subjected to a battery of redundant tests to ensure operating characteristics? Will all plans be based upon computer modeling rather than actual testing? Is this comparable to the space program, which has been plagued with unanticipated accidents?

Southern Nevada Group

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Shipping nuclear waste by rail leaves us wide open for a dangerous terrorist attack. What studies have been done on the possible results of a terrorist attack on one or more of these trains? What if a large airliner was guided into a train bearing nuclear waste?

What if the nuclear waste casks, despite being very thick, are penetrated by state-of-the-art armor piercing weapons? Could this not lead to a "criticality," the potential for the contents to explode and disperse nuclear waste over a broad area? How many people would be killed immediately? How many thousands more would get cancer due to the radiation exposure they would endure?

How would such an accident or terrorist attack ever be cleaned up, and how many billions would it cost? What if an accident or terrorist attack happened over a river and the water were contaminated? What if an accident or terrorist attack happened in a railroad tunnel, where temperatures could run very high and help lead to the escape of nuclear materials and radioactivity?
Nevada's economy is based largely on one industry: the gaming/tourist industry. What would happen to travel to Nevada if there is even ONE nuclear accident? What would happen to our economy if there is a serious nuclear accident that exposes many people to harmful radiation?

How much will this rail line alone cost to build? Over what period of time would the line be built? One estimate is $880 million; with the uncertainties of a long-term capital investment project, what kind of cost over-runs can be expected?

How much has been spent already to study, plan, engineer and prepare the Yucca Mountain project?

If you added all the costs of studying, building and using Yucca Mountain as a nuclear waste site, how much would each kilowatt of nuclear energy have cost the U.S. taxpayer?

Sincerely,

Jane Feldman

Jane Feldman
Conservation Chair

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